

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 34

INTRODUCED BY T. SCHMIDT

A JOINT RESOLUTION OF THE SENATE AND THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE STATE OF MONTANA REQUESTING AN APPROPRIATE INTERIM COMMITTEE TO STUDY ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE IN RURAL AREAS AND RELATED ISSUES.

WHEREAS, many Montanans have unique challenges in access to health care professionals, especially in rural and underserved areas, and 50 counties have received a federal designation as mental health professional shortage areas, and 37 counties are designated primary care and dental health professional shortage areas; and

WHEREAS, in 2002, the Blue Ribbon Task Force on Health Care Workforce Shortage found that Montana is experiencing an unacceptable shortage of qualified health care professionals and that significant barriers exist to alleviating this shortage; and

WHEREAS, the shortage of health care professionals has many reasons, including an aging population that results in increasing demand for health care services and health care professionals retiring from the system without sufficient replacements; and

WHEREAS, there may be a need to expand the professional training in Montana in the University System in specialty areas that currently serve rural Montana, such as specialties in advanced practice registered nursing; and

WHEREAS, Montana participates in purchasing training from existing medical training programs, clinical rotations, and apprenticeships, such as WWAMI, which is a cooperative program of the University of Washington School of Medicine and the states of Wyoming, Alaska, Montana, and Idaho, and WICHE, the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education, for training in the fields of medicine, and the Minnesota Dental Program for training in dentistry; and

WHEREAS, Montana currently has some incentive programs to attract and retain physicians in rural Montana, such as the Montana Rural Physician Incentive Program, and may need to develop other incentive programs for other health care professionals who serve rural Montana, such as advanced practice registered nurses; and

WHEREAS, there may be alternatives for developing a greater capacity for training health care

professionals in the state, such as distance learning, continuing education, career development, and employment training programs; offering degree programs instate, in nontraditional formats, or in different specialty areas; and removing obstacles and assisting the development of additional clinical rotations and clinical sites in Montana.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE AND THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE STATE OF MONTANA:

That the Legislative Council be requested to designate an appropriate interim committee, pursuant to section 5-5-217, MCA, or direct sufficient staff resources to study and make recommendations on:

(1) issues regarding increasing the supply of health care professionals, especially in rural and underserved areas in Montana;

(2) the needs of health care provider education in Montana and a range of options to address the needs;

(3) costs of and benefits to any recommendations to improve access to health care, health care professionals, and professional and specialty education;

(4) methods to increase opportunities for health care professional education at all levels that are in cooperation with and that enhance existing programs;

(5) expansion of the state's public health infrastructure to better serve rural Montana residents' health, especially in the most basic services;

(6) areas that have been successful in providing for the health care needs of their communities and that provide models for other areas; and

(7) the level of adequate funding needed to sustain and expand health care professional education and training programs.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the committee request participation in the study by the Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education, the Office of Economic Opportunity, the Department of Labor and Industry, and the Department of Public Health and Human Services and representation from health care professionals.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that if the study is assigned to staff, any findings or conclusions be presented to and reviewed by an appropriate committee designated by the Legislative Council.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that all aspects of the study, including presentation and review requirements, be concluded prior to September 15, 2006.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the final results of the study, including any findings, conclusions,

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